

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 6702

DEPT PLS REPEAT AS DESIRED

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: UNSC, PORG, SF, WA, AS
SUBJECT: PEACOCK ON AN AUSTRALIAN CONTRIBUTION TO A UN PEACEKEEPING
FORCE FOR NAMIBIA

1. WE ARE FORWARDING SEPTTEL TO DEPT, USUN AND LONDON THE FULL
TEXT OF A STATEMENT FOREIGN MINISTER PEACOCK WILL BE MAKING
TODAY IN PARLIAMENT REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY OF AN AUSTRALIAN
CONTRIBUTION TO A UN PEACEKEEPING FORCE FOR NAMIBIA.

2. THE GIST IS THAT AUSTRALIA HAS NOT BEEN FORMALLY
APPROACHED TO MAKE SUCH A CONTRIBUTION, BUT THAT IF IT IS
ASKED TO DO SO, IT WILL GIVE THE SUGGESTION ITS MOST SERIOUS
CONSIDERATION.

3. PEACOCK STATES "IT IS UNLIKELY THAT AUSTRALIA WOULD BE
ASKED TO PROVIDE COMBATANT FORCES, BUT COULD BE ASKED TO
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SUPPLY MILITARY PERSONNEL AS PART OF AN INTEGRATED LOGISTICS
ELEMENT INVOLVING A TRANSPORT AND SUPPLY UNIT, A COMMUNICATIONS
UNIT, AND SOME ANCILLARY STAFF WHICH WOULD HELP BACK-UP
THE MAIN UN CONTINGENT."

4. AFTER DESCRIBING THE GENERAL BACKGROUND TO THE SITUAT-
TION IN NAMIBIA, PEACOCK ADDS "THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT

THAT THE PROPOSED UN OPERATION WILL BE AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT AND DELICATE ONE. THE WESTERN PROPOSALS CONTAIN A NUMBER OF AMBIGUITIES AND IMPRECISSIONS WHICH COULD BECOME THE SUBJECT OF CONTENTION BETWEEN THE PARTIES THEMSELVES OR BETWEEN ONE OR MORE-OF THEM AND THE UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE. THE PHYSICAL DIFFICULTIES ATTENDANT UPON THE INTRODUCTION OF A UN FORCE WILL BE CONSIDERABLE. EVEN WHEN THE FORCE IS IN PLACE, THERE WILL REMAIN THE RISK OF A BREAKDOWN OF THE AGREEMENT AND OF DISORDER AND VIOLENCE. THE POSSIBILITY OF ATTACKS UPON, AND CASUALTIES FOR, A UN FORCE IN SUCH A HIGHLY CHARGED POLITICAL SITUATION CANNOT BE RULED OUT. AN AUSTRALIAN LOGISTICAL FORCE WOULD BE VULNERABLE TO SUCH ATTACKS."

5. PEACOCK GOES ON, IN DEFERENCE TO SENSITIVITIES ABOUT COST OF LIGHT OF LAST WEEK'S BUDGET, TO NOTE THAT A REQUEST FROM THE UN FOR AN AUSTRALIAN CONTRIBUTION TO A PEACEKEEPING FORCE WOULD HAVE TO BE EXAMINED IN VIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S "LIMITED MILITARY RESOURCES." HE ADDS, "WE SHALL HAVE TO CONSIDER THE VALUE OF AN AUSTRALIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE UN EFFORT AND HOW OUR OWN NATIONAL FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS WOULD BE SERVED THEREBY."

6. PEACOCK CONCLUDES THAT AUSTRALIA'S DECISION WILL HAVE TO BE MADE CONSIDERING THE FACT THAT IT IS ALREADY CONTRIBUTING TO SIMILAR UN FORCES IN THE MIDDLE EAST,
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CYPRUS, AND KASHMIR. ITS DECISION WILL BE MADE AFTER CLOSE CONSULTATIONS WITH THE UN AND OTHER POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTORS, AND AFTER DETAILED CONSIDERATION OF ALL RELEVANT ISSUES. IT WILL HAVE TO BE ASSURED THAT ITS CONTRIBUTION WILL NOT BE "OPEN-ENDED" AND THAT THE TASK GIVEN TO AN AUSTRALIAN CONTINGENT WOULD BE WITHIN ITS CAPABILITIES. "FOR ALL THESE REASONS, THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT IN A POSITION TO RESPOND TO THE INFORMAL UN SOUNDINGS AT THIS STAGE. THE GOVERNMENT WILL, HOWEVER, KEEP THE MATTER UNDER THE CLOSEST REVIEW IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO MAKE AN EARLY DECISION SHOULD A DEFINITE REQUEST BE RECEIVED FROM THE UN."

7. EMBASSY COMMENT: IN SO SAYING, PEACOCK HAS CAREFULLY AVOIDED COMMITTING THE GOA TO PROVIDING AN CONTRIBUTION TO AN UN PEACEKEEPING FORCE FOR NAMIBIA, BUT HAS, AT THE SAME TIME, LAID THE GROUNDWORK BY PREPARING BOTH PARLIAMENT AND THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC FOR FORMAL CONSIDERATION OF SUCH A REQUEST. HE DID NOT MENTION ZIMBABWE AT ALL, ALTHOUGH IT WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE DISCUSSED IN THE SAME CONTEXT. AUSTRALIA WOULD INDEED BE HARD-PRESSED TO CONTRIBUTE TO MORE THAN ONE AFRICAN PEACEKEEPING EFFORT, AND IT MAY BE

THAT BY INITIATING THE DEBATE AROUND NAMIBIA, THE GOA
HOPES TO FORECLOSE THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING ASKED TO
CONTRIBUTE TO A SIMILAR FORCE FOR ZIMBABWE. WE KNOW
THAT THERE WOULD BE BRISK RESISTANCE TO THE LATTE AMONG
THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC, IN PARLIAMENT, AND AMONG THE
AUSTRALIAN MILITARY. NAMIBIA WOULD BE MORE ACCEPTABLE,
BUT MEMORIES OF AUSTRALIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM ARE
STILL STRONG BECAUSE OF THE CONTINUING INFLUX OF VIET-
NAMESE BOAT REFUGEES. A CONTRIBUTION TO A UN PEACEKEEPING
FORCE WILL BE A BIT EASIER FOR AUSTRALIANS TO SWALLOW,
BUT THERE IS A RELATIVELY STRONG RESIDUE OF ILL-FEELING
ABOUT AUSTRALIA'S LONG HISTORY OF HAVING BEEN ASKED
(MAINLY BY THE BRITISH UNDER EMPIRE AND COMMONWEALTH)
TO CONTRIBUTE SOLDIERS TO FIGHT OTHER PEOPLES' WARS.
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PEACOCK, IN ANY EVENT, IS PERSONALLY SYMPATHETIC TO THE
IDEA OF AUSTRALIA'S PARTICIPATION IN UN EFFORTS, AND OUR
GUESS IS THAT THE GOA AS A WHOLE WOULD LIKEWISE WANT
TO HELP. PEACOCK WILL HAVE A TOUGH FIGHT ON HIS HANDS
IF A FORMAL REQUEST FROM THE UN COMES THROUGH, BUT CAN
PROBABLY BE COUNTED UPON TO STRONGLY SUPPORT AUSTRALIAN
CONTINGENT.
ALSTON

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